



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor  
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
450 West State Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0036  
PHONE 208-334-5625  
FAX 208-334-5926

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Ross Mason  
(208) 334-0693

### **BLAINE COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$4.3 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Blaine County residents and businesses received \$4.3 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 20,800 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Blaine County ranks number 44 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$205 for every man, woman and child residing in Blaine County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in 2004 statewide in Idaho communities. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Blaine County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Blaine County Commissioner Dennis Wright says, “Medicaid helps keep our nursing home stay open; 80 percent of the residents are Medicaid. If Medicaid went away we would have to figure out something for these 25 patients. Food Stamps are a safety net. We don’t have a food bank of any sort up here, so without Food Stamps where are those in need going to end up?”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$3.7 million on health care for residents of the county. St. Luke’s Wood River Medical Center in Ketchum received more than \$1 million of that total for providing patient care to Medicaid patients.

A large share of the dollars went to drug stores like Karen’s Family Pharmacy in Hailey. Owner Karen Fisher says, “(Medicaid) helps pay the bills. It’s part of our total business package. I have employees who have a full sick leave and medical plan. It helps pay for that.”

Blaine County residents received \$180,500 in Food Stamps to feed their families in 2004 — \$50,000 more than 2003 and serving an additional 35 people. Atkinson’s Markets in Hailey and Ketchum redeemed almost \$26,000, less than one percent of their annual income. Store Manager Monte Brothwell says, “Every dollar is important. I think it is more about the service to the people to have the program, than it is to the retailer. The dollars go to families and children, and it does help those children to be viable.”

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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**(Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director John Hathaway at 316-0620 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare's  
investment in every Idaho County  
can be found online at  
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**